

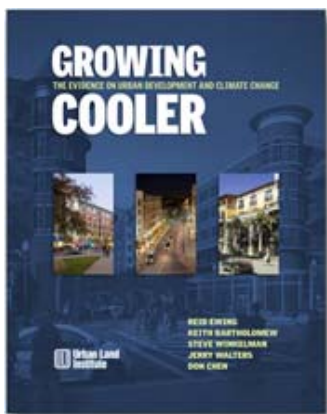
around Smart Growth America



The SGA Newsletter

SUPPORT SGA

Please [consider a generous donation](#) to support us in ensuring we have great, sustainable places for generations to come.



ORDER NOW

Click below to:

Tell A Friend

Sign up
for Smart Growth Around
America

View online

In This Issue

[Housing affordability](#)
[Housing prices connected to fuel prices](#)
[Eliminating the gas tax](#)
[Can we solve it?](#)
[Governors awarded](#)

Housing Affordability

The Center for Neighborhood Technology, an SGA coalition member, along with the Brookings Institution, released a [fantastic web-based tool](#) to measure housing affordability — by adding the oft-ignored transportation costs tied to a home's location. Traditionally, housing is said to be “affordable” when its cost consumes no more than 30 percent of a family's income. But homes come with a location cost that is rarely acknowledged. As the Index shows, families in areas that are closer to jobs and activities and have transit access may pay a little more for housing, but they pay a lot less to get around, especially as gas prices rise. The Index measures housing and transportation costs as a percentage of income on a neighborhood-level basis in 52 metro areas.

Seeing the link between transportation and affordability clearly illustrated raises a critical question: How do we get more housing that doesn't result in huge chunks of a family's budget going into excessive transportation costs? On the Urban Land Institute blog (The Ground Floor,) ULI's Jamie McAfee [suggests a logical](#)



Internships and jobs at SGA

Smart Growth America still has an opening for a paid web intern.

To view all the openings with details for how to apply, check out our [jobs and internships page](#).

And don't miss the job opportunities with the Transportation for America Campaign.

Upcoming Events

You can always find a much more detailed calendar with week-to-week events over at the [Smart Growth Network](#).

[Ecocity 2008](#)

April 22-26

San Francisco, CA

Like the preceding six International Ecocity Conferences, the Ecocity World Summit's focus is on how, through rebuilding our built environment (our cities, towns and villages) in balance with nature, citizens can, now and into the deep future, inhabit healthy and vibrant cities.

[remedy:](#)

According to research presented in [Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change](#), a new book from ULI, a concerted push for compact development would produce a decline of 12 to 18 percent in total metropolitan vehicle miles traveled by 2050. The best ways to reduce vehicle travel is compact development: building places in which people can get from one place to another without driving — mixed-use developments in pedestrian-friendly settings. Check out the [Housing + Transportation Affordability Index](#) from the Center for Neighborhood Technology. Read articles in the [Washington Post](#) and [The Stranger in Seattle](#), view a test case in Atlanta on [the SGA blog](#), and view a (shocking) test case in Nashville by Kaid Benfield on the [NRDC Switchboard](#).

[-->back to top](#)

Housing and gas prices connected

It can be scary to turn on CNBC or CNNMoney these days. Watch for just a minute or two, and you're likely to hear that not only is the housing market in trouble, but we might not be able to see the bottom yet. If you manage to keep watching, you're likely to hear about the latest price of a barrel of oil, headed upwards towards all-time highs around \$120. These two financial markets, fuel and home prices, might seem unconnected to many, but if you look deeper, you can see some encouraging — or discouraging — connections, depending on where you live.

National Public Radio [had a story this week](#) chronicling the trends in metro Washington, D.C., home to some of the most booming exurban counties of the last 20 years. Regionally, prices are down 11 percent, even 20 percent or more

Gov. Parris Glendening will be one of the speakers.

APA 100th National Conference

**April 27-May 1
Las Vegas, NV**

There are some things in Vegas you can share with the folks back home. Come to the 100th National Planning Conference to find out what you can learn from this dynamic city — and from the thousands of planners and officials at the world's premier planning event.

LIISC Urban Forum

**April 28-30
Indianapolis, IN**

This year will be better than ever. We have added more intermediate and advanced level sessions to satisfy the needs of skilled practitioners. The conference will also have more sessions devoted to commercial development. There are two new tracks focusing on retail attraction and retention, as well as tracks on commercial and mixed-use development. You will come away with a deepened knowledge of current commercial revitalization issues, proven methods and strategies for reinvigorating your corridor.

Good Jobs First National Conference: Reclaiming Economic Development

**May 7-8
Baltimore, Maryland**

For those of you interested in the intersection of economic development, labor, subsidies, big-box retail; and smart growth, this is the event for you. Much of the conference will focus on sprawl, smart growth, mass transit, transit-oriented

in areas farther from the core of the region. But not everyone is hurting. Look closer at neighborhoods inside the Beltway, close to job centers, with good access to transit, or with the option of walking and biking nearby, and you'll see a different trend: It's a different story for properties that are closer to the city's center — in areas of Montgomery County that are on the edge of Washington. "When I have a listing in this neighborhood, there are often 40 to 60 people coming through the open houses," said Pam Ryan-Brye, an agent with Long and Foster Real Estate. Inside the city, median home prices are actually up 3.5 percent from a year ago.

SGA's David Goldberg was quoted on the similar trend in Atlanta: "Atlanta was recognized as the fastest-spreading human settlement, probably in the history of the world," Goldberg said. But while the suburbs spread, the city was losing population. Now the tables have turned. In the past two years, new construction in what had been forests and farmland has slowed by more than 70 percent, but construction in town has held steady.

In the midst of skyrocketing gas prices, the best solution we have is to break down the barriers to allowing the market to meet the demand for more housing in compact, walkable, accessible neighborhoods — demand that is only likely to rise as the congestion and fuel costs of driving long distances become more prohibitive.

[Read or listen to the NPR story.](#)

[-->back to top](#)

Solutions to high gas prices

The situation: Bridges are falling down, traffic congestion is worsening, gains in fuel efficiency are reducing gas tax revenues, worthwhile transit projects are sitting on the shelf, and the Highway Trust Fund — funded by

development, Wal-Mart and curbing big-box retail. We will also feature our unique analysis of how sprawl harms union members (and how unions are joining smart growth coalitions) and how economic development subsidies fuel sprawl (and how some states are starting to reform subsidies to support smart growth).

Nature and the Network:
2008 Conference on
Urban Ecosystems
May 28-30
Orlando, Florida

This conference brings together a diverse audience, with seemingly different viewpoints to inspire a new approach—one that addresses nature and the network as one problem with one common solution—building eco-efficient networks.

the 18.5 cents a gallon gas tax that is already inadequate for funding transportation investments — is about to run out of money.

A proposed solution to our current economic woes? Suspend the gas tax.

Pardon?

Gas prices have gotten high enough that people are, for one of the first times in recent history, actually beginning to drive slightly less, according to recent numbers from the Energy Information Administration. No doubt that the high prices at the pump are putting pressure on Americans, to the point where many are altering their driving behavior or even perhaps thinking about living somewhere that allows them to drive less. When prices of a good are high, you find ways to consume less of said good. Economics 101.

Are the President or any of the 3 candidates suggesting “consuming less” as a viable solution?

Sen. McCain announced a proposal to **completely suspend the federal gas tax** from Memorial Day to Labor Day as solution. Sen. Clinton was on Larry King Live this week suggesting that we investigate the prices, tax oil companies, release more oil from the strategic petroleum reserves, and “investigate” the idea of a gas tax holiday. Instead of suggesting ways to consume less of a dwindling resource, they are looking for ways to do the opposite. As **Richard Layman said on his blog**, “consuming more, rather than consuming efficiently, shouldn’t be the objective of public policy.”

An artificial and temporary reduction of gas prices will simply guarantee that absolutely no money goes towards having suitable roads and bridges for those filled-up cars to drive on — not to mention alternatives to



Gov. Parris Glendening, left, and Gov. Christine Todd Whitman with their award from Partners for Livable Communities.

[Unsubscribe from SGAA or change your email preferences here](#)

congestion, like commuter rail and transit. Instead, we can send the full price of gasoline directly into the pockets of oil companies. (An estimated \$10 billion in transportation revenue would be lost, or enough to fully fund Amtrak rail service for 6 years or so.) Meanwhile, we fall farther behind in maintaining our infrastructure: Rust doesn't take the summer off.

Too many Americans are trapped behind the wheel and locked into paying too much for their travel. But at a time when people of all political stripes are realizing our desperate situation with transportation infrastructure, the effects of an energy policy reliant on foreign oil, and the knowledge that we can't reduce our emissions without making sure that we drive less, a gas tax holiday hardly seems like the grand vision that will get us out of this mess.

[-->back to top](#)

Solving it with where we live

By now you probably have seen the ubiquitous ads with pictures of windmills, solar panels, and all things "green," messages from Al Gore's three-year, \$300-million dollar "[we campaign](#)."

Scan the campaign's "Solutions" web page, however, and you'll see the usual range of small-bore do-it-yourself suggestions: Use compact fluorescent bulbs, inflate your tires properly, etc. Missing, however, is any discussion of one of the most powerful moves you could make: Literally moving to a walkable neighborhood, where people typically emit nearly a third less than those in drive-only environments.

With one-third of our emissions generated by transportation, where we choose to live has quite possibly the largest ramifications on our own personal emissions. So

it's discouraging that the most well-known climate advocate running the most well-funded climate advocacy campaign doesn't see encouraging more people to live in places where they have to drive less as an obvious — and simple — solution.

Or simply replacing car trips with walking or biking. Roughly half of all trips we make are less than 3 miles. Fully 28 percent of our trips are under a mile, but we make 75 percent of those by car. Another 13.7 percent of trips are under a half mile.

This isn't about telling people where and how they should live. There is a huge and unmet demand for affordable homes in compact, walkable, connected places where driving may be one of only several options. "We" could do an awful lot to curb rising transportation emissions by supporting smart, walkable development in our own communities.

[-->back to top](#)

Governors awarded

The Partners for Livable Communities recognized former Governors Christine Todd Whitman and Parris Glendening a few weeks ago for their work in creating the Governors' Institute on Community Design. The PLC presented them with a [Bridge Builders award](#) for "their collaboration to create an essential resource." Since its inception just a few short years ago, the GICD has held workshops in six states for sitting Governors and their cabinets, bringing in a knowledgeable team of experts and former Governors to provide invaluable advice on the growth, development and transportation issues selected by the administration.

Partners for Livable Communities is a non-profit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality

of life, economic development, and social equity. Learn more about the [Governors' Institute](#), and the Partners for Livable Communities at www.livable.com

[-->back to top](#)

Smart Growth Around America, news from Smart Growth America